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ILLINOIS DOCUMENTS

Mississippi Sunset at Nauvoo

NAUVOO
STATE PARK

STATE OF ILLINOIS

NAUVOO STATE PARK

Nauvoo State Park, acquired by the State in 1948, lies along Route 96 on the south edge of the town of Nauvoo. The 143 acres in the park slope towards the Mississippi River and at a little distance is glimpsed the restored houses built by the Latter Day Saints—the Mormons.

Nauvoo is one of the most historical places in the midwest, and in some respects has the most remarkable history of any city in the country. Here the Mormons were located from 1839 to 1846. Here, too, the famous French Icarians tried out their communistic form of living and failed.

Once Illinois' largest city with a population of 27,000, today it has less than 1,500 people. The community, however, is noted for its historic background, beautiful surroundings, extensive vineyards and its famous wines and cheese.

The site of the town was once a Sauk and Fox Indian village called Quashquema located on a great horseshoe bend at the Des Moines rapids. In 1824 the Indians, by treaty, relinquished their Illinois lands. Captain James White, the first settler, wishing to obtain the village site of 400 to 500 lodges, gave the Indians 200 sacks of corn for the land.

The first post office in Hancock County was established here in 1830 under the name of Venus. In 1834 the town of Commerce was laid out and Venus was absorbed into it.

After the Mormons were driven out of Missouri they came to Commerce in 1839. They purchased several hundred acres and in 1840 changed the name of the community to Nauvoo. This name is said to be from the Hebrew and means "beautiful place" or "pleasant land."

Joseph Smith Homestead

Nauvoo House

The town was incorporated and given a special charter by the Illinois legislature.

The Mormons energetically began to build their city which in a few years had a population of 20,000. The city was a bee-hive of industry and commercial activity. Prophet Joseph Smith, founder of Nauvoo and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, had sent missionaries like Brigham Young to England and other countries and they caused large migrations to the city.

Joseph Smith, following a revelation in 1841, began the erection of the great temple which although incomplete was first used for services in 1844. It was never completed because of Smith's death. An incendiary burned the temple in 1848. The capstone of one of the pilasters can be seen in the state park. Other remains of the temple have been incorporated into Nauvoo buildings.

Said to have been the finest building in the west at the time, the cost of materials used in it are estimated to have cost $1,000,000. There was great indignation over the temple's burning.

With the rapid growth of the city it became a rendezvous for criminals and during 1844 and 1845 outlawry ran rampant. The Mormons were blamed and in most cases unjustly.

Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum, were shot and killed by a mob in the Hancock County jail at Carthage in 1844 while supposedly under state protection.

Because of their religious ideas and political activities, the Mormons were in sharp conflict with their non-Mormon neighbors. Things reached a climax in 1846 and they were driven from Illinois as they had been from Missouri. Under different leaders some went to Michigan, others to Utah and Texas and a few, including

the family of Joseph Smith, remained in Nauvoo. The story of the trek to Utah is one of the most dramatic events in our history.

Following the Mormon exodus the city became almost a ghost town. In the spring of 1849 a small party of Frenchmen and Germans who called themselves the "Pioneers of Humanity" took possession of the many vacant houses for their communistic colony.

Their leader was Etienne Cabet, a noted lawyer and French political figure. He authored several books including the story of an utopian community, "A Voyage Into Icaria." This book gave the members of this community the name Icarians.

In a few years they found the communistic idea impracticable and the colony broke up. Cabet and a few followers went to St. Louis, others joined a similar colony in Corning, Iowa, and a number remained in the vicinity.

After the Icarians left, a gradual resettlement began. Many new settlers were Germans who had fled their country in 1848. Meanwhile many frame and other houses built in the early 1840s fell into ruin and were torn down. Nauvoo gradually assumed its present form and size.

The Icarians introduced the growing of grapes and the making of wine. This is still an important industry. Some of the former wine cellars are used today in the manufacture of Blue Cheese (Roquefort type), which has nation-wide fame.

The Rheinberger home in the park was originally Mormon built and added on to during the Icarian days. Its basement has one of the first wine cellars and the home has been completely rehabilitated by the State. Adjoining the home is one of the early vineyards that has been growing grapes well over a century.

Sunstone from Nauvoo Temple

When the grapes ripen each year in September there is enacted in the park a pageant which portrays, in part, the old French rite known as the "Wedding of the Wine and Cheese." Many come from a distance to enjoy these festivities.

The park with its shelter house and concession stand, shaded picnic areas, playgrounds and camping site receives year around use. A 12.6 acre fishing lake is in the construction stage.

Visitors have the opportunity to see several authentically furnished Mormon homes which are the property of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints which has its headquarters in Independence, Missouri. Many members of this and the Utah church visit Nauvoo, the home of their ancestors.

Young Grape Tasters

There are 34 historic sites marked, including the Nauvoo House, the Homestead, graves of Joseph, Emma and Hyrum Smith, the Mansion House, the Temple, the Icarian school and about 20 homes.

Travelers to Nauvoo from the south on Route 96 have a delightful experience as the 12-mile drive from Hamilton follows the river and is very park-like in character. It is one of the most picturesque drives in Illinois with a magnificent view of the lake formed by the dam which is part of the Keokuk $2,600,000 hydro-electric plant.

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Century Old Vineyard

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Old Carthage Jail (near Nauvoo)
1844 site of mob killing of Joseph and Hyrum Smith